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ABSTRACT

A comparison of two networks of citizens and parents leads to the conclusion that an effective citizen network in education should have a formal organization, structured leadership, specific goals, and a diverse and active membership. The rise of such groups is attributed to people's feelings that schools are failing to educate. These networks of education-oriented individuals and organizations are based on exchange of information and resources, collective action, and commitment to quality education. Atlanta's "Apple Corps" has proved to be a successful network, particularly with local educators, media, and business and civic groups, although it has not been equally successful in involving black and low-income parents. Apple Corps originated in Atlanta's Junior League and now has an active, multi-organizational membership, an elected leadership, and specific issues and policies it pursues, mostly concerned with local desegregation problems. In contrast, Los Angeles' "grant assistance group" (so named by the author) has no formal organization or leadership, no specific goals, and an inactive membership. Existing solely as an information exchange vehicle, the group has had no impact on the local education system, politicians, or related agencies, although it has linked activists from different groups and backgrounds. (RW)

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CITIZEN NETWORKS IN EDUCATION: STUDIES IN LOS ANGELES AND ATLANTA.

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I. AN OVERVIEW: THE RISE OF CITIZEN NETWORKS

Somehow the public schools in the United States are failing. Educators, community leaders, parents and school administrators offer a wide variety of reasons to explain why this is happening. But they disagree, for the most part, in their evaluations of where the failures exist.

The widespread failure of students to pass competency examinations, their inability to successfully cope with higher education and increased drop-out and truancy rates, suggest to many that the schools have been neglecting instruction in the basic skills. There are also those who blame teachers and principals, claiming that the quality of their teaching and instruction has declined. They are calling for teacher competency tests, a system for teacher evaluation, and dismissal of teachers whose work does not meet the standards to correct these shortcomings. Still another segment feels that more serious student discipline on the part of parents and teachers is required to bring the educational system back up to the level of effectiveness it has reached in the past.

In the middle of this debate and controversy are the parents who may not always be concerned with the wider social and political issues that affect the quality of education their children are receiving; they just know that their children are not learning and they want to know why they are not. In this age of advanced technology and scientific achievement, when unemployment is high and the economy seems to become more unstable everyday, parents expect the educational institutions to prepare their children to successfully compete for the material rewards that are available. This is especially true for minority and low-income parents who look to the schools to provide their children with education, the only means they see available for them to escape the poverty cycle that has trapped so many of their parents. As David Lewis, President of Exodus, Inc. in Atlanta says,

> "School is the most positive institution in any community. Minority parents believe that once they can get their kids through school, there is hope for them."

Yet now, the ability of the schools to fulfill these needs is being questioned and parents find themselves caught in the middle with no power or authority to change and improve the system. However, the passive role that parents have been relegated to by teachers and other school officials, is becoming a thing of the past.

The conviction on the part of more and more parents that the American public schools are in serious trouble has given rise to a movement among parents to gain more control over the policies and practices of the educational systems that affect their children. They are no longer willing to accept as law, the opinions and theories on what's best for their children from the educational "experts". As a result, there is now a more concerted effort than ever before for parents to become actively and aggressively involved in what goes on at their children's schools, to protest policies they don't agree with and to get satisfactory answers when they have questions about their children's performance in school.

Parents have the potential to wield a great deal of power and influence over the decisions that are made within the educational system. However, for the most part, that potential hasn't yet been tapped. According to Claire Richardson, President of Northeast Atlanta Parents for Public Schools (NAPPS),

> "The potential for power is unlimited but parents, for the most part, are not knowledgeable about how to question or activate."

In many cases, an additional problem exists among low-income and minority parents: an inability to communicate with school officials whom they regard as experts and authorities and feel unequipped intellectually to approach on any subject pertaining to their child's education.

Another obstacle to increased parent participation comes from the schools themselves. Parents are often not involved because they feel that the school officials don't want them around and will not respond to their questions or input. In public schools, it is usually the principal who sets the tone of parent involvement in a particular school. A secure, successful principal will usually welcome and encourage parent input, while a poor administrator is more likely to resist or forbid any appreciable participation on the part of the parents.

Many parents and activists believe that one way for parents to gain the attention and power they seek to effect real change within the educational system is to join forces with other leaders and organizations and unit behind certain educational issues. It is believed that it is only this kind of widespread and inclusive action that would make the system attentive and responsive to the needs and desires of the parents and the community as a whole.

Dr. Norman Thomas, Community Relations Coordinator for the Atlanta Public School System feels that,

"Before we can have effective parent community involvement, pressure has to come from the community itself."

Yet, so far, that pressure is not being exerted sufficiently.

The Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy at Clark College in Atlanta reports in their study, Consensus Politics in Atlanta: School Board Decisionmaking 1974-1978,

> "One of the striking characteristics of the Atlanta environment is the lack of strong policy-oriented citizens groups concerned about education. Where other political issues are open to citizen involvement, education is often ignored."

This neglect of educational issues seems to be changing. We are now beginning to see attempts by parents and community members to maximize their effectivness by forming networks which are based on multi-organizational memberships, information and resource exchanges, collective action in applicable areas and a commitment to quality education. Many of these networks are attempting to not only provide a platform and an atmosphere for effective citizen involvement, but also to educate the general public about the relationship between what happens to our society as a whole and what happens to our schools. As one network member in Los Angeles put it,

> "Public awareness regarding education must change. Most people don't understand the relation between education and the crime rate, unemployment and political apathy. The community and parents must be educated to this correlation."

The rise of citizen networks is increasingly seen as the only viable method of getting the voices of parents and community members heard by the educational administration in the schools. Since the pattern in the past of parents complaining but no one listening seems to be shifting, the strategy of these networks calls for joint participation and involvement in order to obtain maximun results.

This is not to say that all networks are effective and forceful by sole virtue of having members who represent a wide number of organizations. The elements that give citizen networks their greatest chance for success at tackling specific issues are also the ones that can cause the most problems and divisiveness within an organization. A network that represents a number of diverse groups, whose members include individuals from different ethnic and socio-economic spheres can gain a certain leverage and credibility because they are speaking for a cross section of the population. However, it is precisely this heterogeneity that can make it difficult for a group to act collectively on a number of issues. Often the needs and concerns of the individual groups that make up the network are so dissimilar, agreement on priorities becomes impossible. At this time, cross-class and cross-racial networking is the execption rather than the rule.

The purpose of "networking" is to exchange information and resources among different organizations to strengthen their respective positions on any number of issues. The word "exchange" implies that something of use or value is given in return for something else; therefore organizations will usually only network with other groups in similar positions of status, influence and power. As a result, low income organizations are often excluded from this process. Yet it is precisely these groups, who usually have few resources and contacts on their own and who are often cut off from informational sources, that would benefit most from some kind of network involvement. Those who are most vocal about the inequities and problems in the public schools are the middle-class; those who have certain options about where their children will attend school. They have the money to either enroll their children in private schools or move into neighborhoods that have better educational facilities. Therefore, the brunt of the problems that exist in the schools falls on the low-income parent who remains alienated from the systems that can help bring about the necessary changes.

The effectiveness of a network can be measured in a number of other ways. Of paramount importance is the leadership quality of a particular group. It is the group's leader who most

influences the issues to address, strategies to use and goals to obtain. Leaders are also the representatives of the organization who are in closest contact with area politicians, the media and other community leaders. As such, they are a deciding factor in how seriously the organization's platform is taken by the community as a whole and by key decisionmakers in particular. Another key factor in determining the effectivness of a particular network is the membership. The diversity of the members as well as their level of activity and commitment within the network seems to be more important than size to a group's success. Equally as important is the kind of interaction and linkage network groups are able to establish between their organization and key political representatives, school board administrators, universities and government officials. Such linkage broadens a group's support base within the community and makes the group more accessible to additional information and resources.

This report will profile two citizen networks: one in Atlanta and the other in Los Angeles. Although they are both self-initiated organizations, their similarity ends there. One is totally informal with no formal leadership structure, no specific goals and a membership that meets only occassionally. This group was formed as a resource and information network, and although the members are all active in educationally oriented groups, they have no platform of issues that address

the problems of education in Los Angeles. The network in Atlanta, on the other hand, has an elected leadership, a membership that is active and that attempts to cross ethnic and class lines, a constantly developing plan for action and strategy and very specific goals and purposes. They are both interesting examples of the growth of involvement, not only of parents, but of community members and citizens, in the public school system and the quality of education it delivers.

II. THE NETWORKS: APPLE CORPS, INC.

Atlanta Parents and Publics Linked for Education (Apple Corps, Inc.) grew out of a task force established by the Junior League of Atlanta to examine how they could become more involved in, and cognizant of, public education in the city of Atlanta. They felt that one of the ongoing problems within the system was that public education was never considered part of city development as a whole, but was viewed as a "special interest" issue, of importance only to parents whose children were being educated in the public schools.

Susan Bledsoe, President of the Board of Directors of Apple Corps and guiding force behind the establishment of the network said it was created because,

> "Public education has become a large concern for everyone. The Junior League wanted to get groups to sit down together, share resources and get involved in the larger issues."

She also felt that it was important to get a greater number of blacks involved who had not been active in many community organizations, as well as those who had different priorities and interests.

After discussion, research and additional exploration of the status of the public schools in Atlanta, the Junior League decided to try and pull together a group that would be comprised of local

community and neighborhood groups who were concerned with public education and the quality of the school system. They would work together sharing information, resources, concerns and strategies to improve the myriad problems that the Atlanta public school system faced. Although various parent and citizen groups in Atlanta were already working in a limited way to improve their local schools, the need clearly existed for additional support in order to enhance these groups' effectivness. Out of this task force an interorganizational steering committee was formed which was representative of groups already in existence throughout the city. They met for a year in order to define the goals and purposes of such a group before submitting an official proposal for incorporation and funding to the Junior League. Their proposal was accepted and Apple Corps, Inc. was officially begun in May,1979. As a community involvement resource center it hoped to provide technical assistance to parents, schools and community groups throughout the city specifically geared to educational issues. Initial funding included $20,000 from the Jr. League, $10,00 from the Trust Co. Bank of Georgia, $2,300 from the National Institute of Education for the purchase of materials and resources and an unspecified amount from the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce.

The aim of Apple Corps was to design a resource center that would support and strengthen local parent and citizen groups interested in working with the public schools to achieve a number of goals such as:

* To increase public awareness of the total community's responsibility for the quality of its public schools.

* To promote greater knowledge of the Atlanta Public school system by providing for an information service.

* To forge bonds of cooperation and mutual help among parent and community groups so that they can seek solutions to common problems, share ideas and concerns and be a strong, effective organization within their own community schools.

One of the most important and difficult goals of Apple Corps was to facilitate community involvement in the schools in a city where parent participation has been characterized as "benign to non-existant." They are attempting to accomplish this by understanding what educational needs are, and then attempting to meet them; recognizing successful program ideas which are capable of meeting these needs and, most important, encouraging the use of parent and community resources by the public school system.

At present, Apple Corps has begun to implement a number of objectives for the first year. The money provided by the Chamber of Commerce has been used to establish and maintain a telephone information service designed to link callers with appropriate resources that can address their specific needs. Although they have been getting calls requesting assistance and guidance on specific problems in certain schools, this service seems to duplicate one already in existence at the Division of Student and Community Services of the Public School System. Since Apple Corps has not, as yet, been able to build up their own resource and information files to include all of the information they need to deal with these calls effectivly, most of them are referred to the school system's hot line. However, their telephone information service number is being included on posters and other advertising materials being distributed by the Chamber of Commerce in their current advertising campaign designed to focus attention on the benefits of public school education in Atlanta. Eventually, the telephone service will serve as an independant information gathering section of Apple Corps, It will provide a means of contact with people concerned about schools all over the city and a way of identifying issues requiring further study.

They have begun publication of a monthly newsletter called "School Talk" which contains information about school issues, scheduled meetings and provides a forum for sharing ideas and information. Copies of newsletters are sent to all schools, PTA neighborhood groups, school system officials, etc.

Apple Corps has been able to establish extensive links with administrators and officials of the Atlanta Public School System, itself. As a result they have access to a great deal of information regarding proposed policies, plans and tactics of the school board and its members. The Board of Education has assigned its public relations coordinator as a permanent liaison with Apple Corps and he is currently a member of the group's Board of Directors.

As a new organization in the city, Apple Corps is attempting to publicize its existance and programs. It holds open meetings at their offices where parents and other community members can come to exchange ideas and concerns as well as learn more about Apple Corps and what it's trying to accomplish. The Director of Apple Corps and her assistant have been actively seeking invitations to speak at meetings of PTAs, neighborhood groups and community organizations to inform them of their goals and plans.

The Program Development Committee of Apple Corps is currently attempting to design additional programs to reach out to Atlanta residents and involve them in what they are doing. At the moment,

the committee functions informally and has not established or implemented any specific long range programs. It is currently involved in providing informational materials, including handouts, for parents with such titles as: "Who To Ask For What In The School System" and "Parent-Teacher Conferences: Questions To Ask." The committee is also working to establish a speakers bureau composed of volunteers with expertise in specific areas. They will help advise various community and parent groups throughout the city on a wide range of education issues.

In an interview about the purposes of Apple Corps with one of its members, it was suggested that the avowed and publicized goals of the organization were misleading: that the real aim of Apple Corps was to establish a coalition of community groups that would perpetuate the present parental role and power of Atlanta's middle class. It was conjectured that Apple Corps wants to cultivate the image of being involved with the community in order to gain the leverage necessary to become an external authority on Atlanta public schools and thus be in a position to influence decisions made by the Board of Education. It was charged that,

> "The bottom line is their desire to become a force within the school system; to use the organization as a springboard to political power and possibly garner for certain members top-notch jobs as policy experts on public education and school-community participation."

MEMBERSHIP/OPERATING STRUCTURE

The organizations that are currently members of Apple Corps are groups whose major or sole focus is the quality of education in Atlanta's public schools or who address a wider number of issues with education being one of their concerns. Initially, there was a reluctance on the part of a number of these groups to become involved with Apple Corps, primarily because of the role the Junior League played in establishing the organization. Many of these groups joined in order to get the benefit of the resources and funding that would become available to a group like Apple Corps and to be able to influence policy decisions that would affect their constituency. David Lewis, President of Exodus, a non-profit corporation with a commitment to provide more meaningful educational opportunities for Atlanta inner city youth, became involved in Apple Corps because he, "saw Apple Corps as a means to educate people about how to make changes, use the resources that are available, and get things done." There still exists a great deal of suspicion of the part of these grass roots, low-income groups, both black and white, as to the true motives

and purposes of Apple Corps. Part of the problem stems from the anger that some of them feel because they saw the need for this type of organization and unsuccessfully attempted to get funding for such a group. They resent the fact that when middle and upper class whites also realized this need existed, they had no trouble getting the money to establish this organization.

The Board of Directors is comprised of individual appointees as well as representatives of Apple Corps' permanent organizational members. They have the legal responsibility for the operation of the group and meet on a quarterly basis in order to fulfill their duties, which include:

*approving policy regarding center operations.

*approving the centers annual work plan and budget.

*electing an executive committee.

*evaluating center operations.

The officers of the Board are nominated and chosen from this larger group. The founding members of the steering committee chose the Board of Directors who, according to Marcia Klenbort, Director of Apple Corps,

> "wanted to get as great a cross section of people from different organizations to serve on the Board as possible. However, in a number of cases, specifically the Chamber of Commerce and Equal Opportunity Atlanta, we were sent members of their Boards instead of line and staff people who would work within the community."

She also notes that:

> "The Steering Committee that started Apple Corps was the really cohesive group. When that dissolved and the Board became the governing body, they didn't have the chance to grow slowly and get to know each other, to develop trust and confidence in each other like the Steering Committee did."

The Executive Committee is made up of the officers of the organization and the heads of the standing committees. They meet monthly to provide ongoing supervision of center operations within the framework of policy, plans and budgets established by the Board of Directors.

The Director of Apple Corps has primary responsibility for implementing the organization's programs. Under the general supervision of the Executive Committee, the Director administers center operations and directs staff members, acts as editor of the newsletter and originates and effects certain programs and policies. At present, the Director and the Administrative Assistant are the only paid staff members of Apple Corps. They are aided by a number of volunteer workers who are primarily used to edit, write and collate the newsletter, research education issues, clip appropriate news articles for resource and information files and monitor Board of Education meetings.

Some of the member organizations at this time include Northside Atlanta Parents for Public Education (NAPPS), a middle to upper

class white group formed when desegregation in Atlanta precipitated large scale white flight from the public schools on the Northside of the city. The members of NAPPS were those who decided to keep their children in public schools and work with the desegregation movement to see what effect it had on the quality of education before deciding whether or not to take their children out of the public school system. The group's members not only became more involved and active in their local schools, but also worked to educate and convince other parents to stay and become involved. Parents For Action, another member organization, is a group of predominantly middle class blacks fighting to upgrade the quality of education that their children are getting in the public schools in Southwest Atlanta. Issue oriented, they meet only as specific issues relevant to their members come up. Most recently, they drew up a document listing what they saw as specific examples of unequal education among Atlanta's 125 public schools. They have sought the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union in documenting their charges and bringing suit against the Atlanta Public School system. Additional member organizations include the League of Women Voters of Atlanta/ Fulton County, Exodus, Council of In-Town Neighborhoods and Schools, Atlanta Council for Public Education, Economic Opportunity Atlanta, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta PTA Council and Atlanta Junior League.

At present, recruitment of new members and expansion to include other organizations seems to have slowed down considerably since Apple Corps initial incorporation. Some members feel that attempts to become more involved in this area at this time would mean sacrificing some of the present programs and goals of the organization because of the manpower needed to recruit new people. However, there are others who feel that it is imperative new members be pulled into the organization during its first year and that these members must be more representative of the population of the city of Atlanta. As Claire Richardson, President of NAPPS says,

> "If the only people who are working with Apple Corps, whether through time spent working with the organization or by using its resources, are the Jr. League and other middle class blacks and whites, there is no sense continuing. We need to pull in people who aren't active in any organizations. Most Jr. League and NAPPS people find it impossible to function in low income areas. We need members of those communities to tell us what they need, what the problems are and to reach out to other community members."

There is a growing dissatisfaction on the part of some of the blacks currently involved in Apple Corps because they are beginning to view the organization as another strictly middle-class group with no real committment to involving grassroots community members. The current structural organization of Apple Corps seems to predispose it to appeal

to this segment of society. Key positions on the Board of Directors are all filled by whites. The position of Vice President is currently being held in abstentia by a black who was involved in the initial steering committee that led to the founding of Apple Corps. Some feel that his absence allows Apple Corps to use him as an example of the total inclusion of the black Community without actually having to deal with any of the concerns, questions and issues he may have raised and forced the Board to address. It is interesting to note that the vice president, before he left, approached another black member, a woman who is outspoken and often critical of the operating methods of Apple Corps, about taking over his position during his absence. Although she agreed to do so, she hasn't been approached by the Board about doing it. As a result, this position still remains vacant and the kinds of concerns and objectives that might have been raised by a black member may now be overlooked.

One member of the Board of Directors sums up the problem this way;

> "Unless Apple Corps faces the need to recruit a more representative membership, they aren't contributing anything to help improve the public education system. It is not impacting on the schools and communities they should direct themselves to and benefit from. Middle class parents who have the time and interest can always extract whatever they want from the public schools. Apple Corps must deal with parents from low social-economic groups who have no power and no knowledge about how to get it."

An organization in Atlanta that has consistently refused to become involved with Apple Corps is the Atlanta PTA Council. Out of 123 public schools in Atlanta, 71 of them have active PTA organizations and of that number, 56 are affiliates of the PTA Council. The group does not have a hugh membership but it does have the attention of school administrators. Although its President, Caroline Krowder, who is also a member of the school board, has in the last few months assigned a member of the council to act as a representative on Apple Corps' Board of Directors, it is more of a token gesture than a commitment to working with the group. She feels that Apple Corps is duplicating the work of the PTA which is finally getting back the power and clout they previously exercised. This will allow them to affect Board of Education policy and organize parents to become more active in the schools. In spite of the Council's reluctance to become part of the network, Apple Corps plans to continue its efforts to elicit the support and alliance of the PTA Council, a group they feel it would be especially beneficial to work with. Ms. Krowder also mentioned that part of her reluctance to commit the PTA Council to working with Apple Corps is the same distrust and suspicion mentioned earlier that still exists about the organization.

Marcia Klenbort, Apple Corps' Director, recognizes and admits the need for the group to somehow gain trust and credibility in the black community.

> "Grassroots participation is a stumbling block at present. There is fear and suspicion on the part of low income groups and stereotypical views still prevail on the side of both blacks and whites about each other. The group needs to take very seriously the fact that 90% of the school system is black and 75% is poor. If were not working with them, we're not doing our job."

However, many still see the major problem Apple Corps faces in carrying out their goals as the continued perception on the part of the black community of Apple Corps as a white organization. The blacks who are involved are not visable on a day to day basis; as a result, those who do visit the office see a white woman who is the director, her administrative assistant who is the only black that is involved in the operating procedures of Apple Corps and a host of volunteers, all of whom are white and from the middle to upper income groups. It is this lack of black involvement and visibility in the operation of Apple Corps that may continue to make its credibility among blacks an elusive goal.

Michael Fisher, one of the founding members of Apple Corps, notes that,

> "in order for low-income blacks to become involved they need to see action in their own communities. A black director is important to this effort."

DESEGREGATION- PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

In order to understand the problems and the needs of the Atlanta Public School system and, therefore the issues groups like Apple Corps are attempting to address, it is helpful to know how school desegregation in Atlanta has contributed to the present state of the schools, the characteristics of parent and community involvement with the educational system and the polarization of blacks and whites in the city.

Initially, a volunteer transfer program was instituted to comply with Federal desegregation laws, but it was only black students who opted to attend schools in the white Northside area of the city to take advantage of what they saw as a better education. It became one-way desegregation and was declared inadequate. The Atlanta Board of Education then instituted the Majority to Minority Transfer Plan (M to M) which, by October, 1973, had succeeded in attracting the participation of 2,907 students. Only 25 of them were white.

Then in the early 70's, the Federal courts issued new requirements for desegregation which said that each school's faculty population had to reflect the racial balance of the school's enrollment.

According to the report, Consensus Politics In Atlanta: School Board Decisionmaking, 1974-1978, the teacher transfer plan, as well

as the student transfer plan, was felt by many to be deliberately instituted in a way that "was calculated to cause the most dissatisfaction. About 800 teachers were transferred, most without any consultation."

It is still a common and widely shared belief among blacks in Atlanta that this plan robbed their schools of the best black teachers who, for the most part, were sent along with the best white teachers to the predominantly white schools of the city's northside. As a result, many teachers left the school system because they were unprepared to deal with the new situations they found themselves in and they got no support or help from administrative officials. A Compromise Plan was finally worked out between the Atlanta NAACP and the school board. The plan called for bussing and integration with the stipulation that white students only had to attend majority black schools if a total of 30% whites would exist in the enrollment as a result of this action. As an additional integration device, the school structure was changed and middle schools, which are similar in structure to junior high schools, were established. This Compromise Plan also made provisions for the desegregation of the school administration which was accomplished by the creation of almost 20 new positions to be filled by blacks.

The M to M Transfer plan continued to have problems because of the movement of black students to Northside schools but almost no transfer

of white students to black schools. During a conference called by the Atlanta University Center for School and Community Services, to discuss equalizing M to M participation, it was noted that,

> "students can be attracted to a voluntary transfer program only if they, and their parents, can be convinced of a positive educational benefit."

It was realized that unless white students were able to transfer to a black school where the climate for education is better than at the white schools and where the academic standards are comparable or higher, they were not going to take part in the transfer program. Once it was obvious to white parents that their children would have to attend school with blacks; and to black parents that their children would be forced to leave their own communities to receive quality education, hostilities erupted and everyone was unhappy with the plan. However, there were those parents who saw this as an opportunity to become involved with or to renew their committment to quality public education in Atlanta. Although these parents are committed, they are all too few in number and the same parents tend to be involved in all activist organizations, It was the desegregation plan that led to the establishment of Northside Atlanta Parents for Public Schools (NAPPS) who felt that the quality of public school education hadn't changed but that parents' perception of the schools had. A perception that is caused, according to Joyce Daniels, Education Coordinator

for the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, because,

> "people think Atlanta Public Schools are so bad mainly because they're predominantly black."

Although the efforts of NAPPS—encouraging white parents to wait and see what effect desegregation would have on the schools before pulling their kids out—was limited, they felt it was an encompassing attempt. At present, out-of-area busing in Atlanta occurs only under the Voluntary Transfer Plan but desegregation continues to be a problem for black parents who are angered at what they see as their only options: keeping their children enrolled in their own community schools where they feel education is unequal or busing them to Northside schools. Neither choice seems to be acceptable.

"The sleeping giants are the parents out there. They can run anything."

Caroline Krowder, President
PTA Council, Atlanta

Almost everyone acknowledges the potential that parents have for influencing and changing the public school system. At a time when these schools are coming under increased attack for their failure to provide students with a quality education, the climate seems perfect for strong and vocal parent involvement. Yet the evidence does not always support this idea. Parent participation in Atlanta is characterized by Dr. Norman Thomas, Community Relations Coordinator for the Atlanta Public School System, as

> "benign to non-existant; as an extension of school administrators and principal's views. Parents are usually restricted to work with PTA groups which are often controlled by principals and not very substantive."

In Atlanta, school board elections every four years have often served as the only involvement many parents have in school issues. Many parents go to school only when specific problems with their children arise. The attitude of these parents is summed up by Mamie Washington, Associate Professor of Social Work at Atlanta University and a member of Parents for Action,

> "School administrators feel that if you are a parent, you are naturally uneducated. If schools continue to assume the posture that parents don't care, they won't and then the children are lost."

The school system itself has traditionally been very weak in the area of community relations. It gives "lip service" to community involvement but has shown no real commitment to establishing ties with community members and parents. In general, the policy process of the Board of Education appears designed to insure that citizen involvement will not be too active or effective. Currently, a new policy on parent and community involvement has been submitted to the Atlanta Board of Education for ratification. The proposal includes the statement that:

> "Participation of parents and community members in the development of school programs and in-school activities is seen as an essential element in the maintenance and enhancement of a closer working relationship between the Atlanta public schools, parents and citizens. Therefore, it shall be the policy of the Atlanta Board of Education that any school or program providing direct instructional services to students shall have a mechanism for fostering parental and community involvement."

The proposed policy contains a number of regulations to carry out this philosophy, including:

1. An organized and functioning organization to foster school and community involvement in every school.

2. Administrative staff members will be assigned to each of these school-community units to facilitate the organization and coordination of each group.

3. Students, parents and community members are to be given continuous opportunities to participate actively in the planning and/or implementation of school programs.

Ideally this policy, if accepted by the Board of Education, would give the importance of parent/school involvement the same priorities as regular educational curriculum and would evaluate the administrations effectivness in this area.

Perhaps the most important facet of this policy is the fact that the primary responsibility for establishing and implementing this program would fall on school principals, who, among parents, are probably the most controversial members of the educational administration. They are seen both as the keystone to effective school community involvement and as the weakest link in the school administration. They are largely autonomous and the current structure doesn't allow them to be evaluated. Many of them are strongly opposed to any parent participation in schools at all, falling back on the well worn "we know best" excuse.

Claire Richardson, President of NAPPS stated,

> "The principal is the absolute key to quality public education. If his relationship with the community in which his school is located is good, he is perceived as doing a good job and his school is thought of well."

The acceptance of this policy by the Board of Education seems to be dependent on a number of considerations. The Board still wants controlled parent community involvement and they must be convinced that this proposal would not reduce their power in policymaking decisions. They also want a program that won't cost anything. However, even if

the school board does accept this policy, there is doubt about how community members might feel toward a program established by the school board whose motives and priorities are suspect from the beginning.

Yet, many feel that adoption of this policy is an important and necessary step toward obtaining increased parental involvement which would bring about better education and resources within the schools. Dr Norman Thomas sums it up this way,

> "In the absence of a real policy, we can't expect anything to happen. We must have a formal mechanism to address the nuts and bolts issues of how you insure parent-community involvement. This policy can open the door to involvement and parents who want to participate will be able to."

SELECTION OF POLICIES AND ISSUES

Although Apple Corps has been established as a resource center and does not want to adopt the strategies of an advocacy group, they recognize and accept the importance of choosing the issues they wish to address carefully and collectively. Possibly the greatest obstacle to acheiving this kind of collective action is their structure as a cross-class and cross-racial network. The concerns about education in Atlanta of low or middle income black members and those of the white members who live in affluent Northside Atlanta, seem to be diametrically opposed. The huge difference in the concerns of these two groups is reflected in the feelings of one member who said:

> "They're (whites) talking about resurfacing tennis courts (at Northside public schools) and we're talking about equal education and getting contemporary books for our kids."

When Apple Corps was first inaugurated, there was no single main issue the membership agreed to address. Now they feel it is particularly important for them to undertake a project that will cut across as many lines as possible and unite people. However, they are very reluctant to become involved in any issue where they cannot forsee a high probability of success. They reason that failure at

this time on any project could cause irreversible damage to their influence and credibility within the community, while success would insure further involvement and interest in the group and what it's trying to accomplish. Some members feel that it is this kind of success that would bring in more low income participants who are waiting to see if the organization will work before they will commit any time to it. In addition, some black members feel that there are those in the organization who refuse to see many of the problems in the Atlanta School System as basically one of race; that they don't want to face the black/white issue in the schools at all.

On the surface, it would seem that the predominantly white schools located in Northside Atlanta have gotten an unequal share of superior resources, facilities, teaching staffs and curriculum programs. The Northside schools number only nine in a system which totals 123, yet they are consistently pointed to as an example of the first rate public school education available in Atlanta. There are parents who complain that even these schools have out of date textbooks, poor teachers and that students aren't receiving optimum educations. In a pamphlet published by NAPPS to publicize the strengths and benefits of these schools, it is noted that among other things, Northside schools offer:

* A teaching staff that is required to pursue continuing further study and are provided in-service training by top specialists.

* A host of specialists to attend to student needs including speech, vision and hearing impairment specialists, psychologists, psychometrists and learning disability experts.

* A pupil-teacher ratio of 28:1 in elementary schools and 23:1 in middle and high schools.

* Special programs including a school of the performing arts, an archeological program, challenge programs and honor classes.

In the face of the existence of these programs at Northside and the absence of comparable projects in predominantly black schools, it is not surprising that these inequities are interpreted as another instance where "the haves continue to get and the others don't." These are the kinds of basic problems and differences that may make it difficult for Apple Corps members to act collectively or to choose issues to address.

The implementation of any real projects at this time has been impeded by the resignation of the first Executive Director of Apple Corps. It is widely thought by other members that the reason for her resignation stemmed from the inability of the woman who nurtured and organized Apple Corps from its infancy, before official incorporation, to step down and allow the new director to carry out her duties and responsibilities as operational head of the group. According to

other members, the director was constantly questioned about her procedures, supervised in the performance of her job and generally restricted in the initiation of new projects. Interestingly enough, most of the other officers and members of the Board of Directors found her performance satisfactory and positive. After her resignation, Marcia Klenbort, a member of Apple Corps, was appointed as temporary director until the position could again be filled. However, because of the tenuous and temporary nature of her position, Ms. Klenbort has been in what she calls a "holding pattern". Her role has been limited to such duties as publishing the newsletter, supervising volunteers and organizing the library. She has since been officially submitted to the Board as permanent director and has been elected to the position until July 1, the end of the fiscal year for the organization. Then there will be a general evaluation of Apple Corps' accomplishments and Ms. Klenbort's contributions in particular.

Ms. Klenbort is confident that now that Apple Corps has a fulltime head, a comprehensive program for action by the group can be designed and carried out.

She sees a number of specific problems that can be addressed by Apple Corps right now, including the problem of declining enrollments

in many schools which is leading to lowered budgets and school closings. She would like Apple Corps to compile more information on school enrollments and closings and examine school board policy on how the decisions about these schools are made. She feels that the school board in its considerations relies solely on the number of students attending each school rathar than examining the quality of education, test scores, competancy results, etc., offered at each site. There is also a question as to whether the middle schools, which were established to facilitate desegregation, but never fully absorbed into the Atlanta educational system, will be abandoned. Another issue of concern to many parents in Atlanta that Klenbort wants addressed is the lack of bus monitors on vehicles transporting students to school. Voluntary Transfer students ride free on bus companies contracted by the city while the rest use city busses at reduced fares. There have been a number of safety and disciplinary problems on these city contracted busses and many parents are investigating means of improving the situation.

There are any number of educational and community conerns that Apple Corps could successfully address if its members agree on the most important issues and the direction they should take as an organization. Until the dissatisfaction that

currently exists because of the lack of low income representation within the group is quelled and the community's perception of Apple Corps as a white, middle-class establishment group is overcome, it will face increased interorganizational discord and/or the resignation of those black and low-income members who are currently involved.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Of utmost importance to the success and effectivness of Apple Corps as an agency for change and influence within the Atlanta public school system is the choice of strategies and tactics they will utilize when addressing pertinent issues.

Initially the founders of Apple Corps saw themselves as an "enabling" organization; one that would bring people together to solve various educational issues. Many members feel that operating Apple Corps primarily as a resource/information center is the most efficient way to establish credibility and a reputation for effectivness among the members of the Atlanta community and that an integral part of their success as this kind of center is the ability to accurately disseminate a wide range of information.

However, there is a growing conviction on the part of other members that Apple Corps would be more valuable and effective as an advocacy group, a term that some members equate with militancy. Yet, these same participants feel that Apple Corps' role as a facilitator includes speaking out on certain issues and advising other groups on how to organize their constituencies to attack and rectify certain problems. It seems that in these instances, their "resource" and "advocacy" directions overlap. According to one member of Apple Corps' Board of Directors who supports the advocacy approach,

> "Apple Corps as an advocacy group could do valuable, important things. If the membership were to act collectively in this context on certain issues, the Board of Education would be forced to make certain policy changes; move to address our concerns.

Mamie Darlington adds,

> "Blacks want to be able to reach more community based people; to be able to provide technical assistance and send representatives to groups who need help being heard and acting."

In the report, Citizen Organizations: A Study of Citizen Participation in Education Decisionmaking, conducted by Dr. Marilyn Gittell and Dr. Don Davies for the Institute for Responsive Education,

it is noted that:

> "...effectivness (of organizational strategy-orientation) was associated with the pursuit of an advocacy strategy. While the advocacy orientation was more likely to promote influence, such an orientation was almost exclusive to middle-class, voluntary organizations."

The report also observes that:

> "...advocacy organizations were alone in reporting contacts with teachers' unions, established civic interest groups, universities and the media."

It is interesting then, that an organization like Apple Corps, which conforms to most of the above criteria, has resisted the designation or program agenda of an advocacy group. Although they deny being a middle class organization, this segment of the population makes most policy and program decisions and makes up the majority of the members and the officers of the Board of Directors. In addition, there are currently only two paid staff personnel and the bulk of the work that they undertake is being carried out by volunteers. Whether this will begin to change as the organization grows and funding increases, depends a great deal on the emphasis the members put on particular issues.

Apple Corps has been able to make initial, if superficial, contact with some of the insitutions of higher education in Atlanta.

They have also been in contact with several city civic groups and the media. Contact with the media has been limited to their role as the subjects of various interviews and feature stories for newspapers as well as radio.

Advocacy as a strategy for the group is seen by many members as a direction that would overtax their present capabilities. It would force them to address many issues that dilute the effectiveness they would have if they are able to focus on one issue at a time and succeed in getting the desired results.

Marcia Klenbort states,

> "If we become a group that tries to take a position on every issue, we will splinter and die. At the beginning we can't address everyone's needs. We have to focus somewhere specific and go in and see what needs to be done. If we can make it work there, that kind of success can be duplicated in other places."

III. THE GRANT ASSISTANCE GROUP- LOS ANGELES

The Los Angeles network profiled here differs dramatically in its operating procedures, structure, goals and scope from the group in Atlanta.

The difference between a formal network and an informal, unincorporated one can be illustrated by the fact that the designation of the Los Angeles unit as the Grant Assistance Group is primarily for purposes of identification alone. They do not use the title themselves and their very limited participation in any specific activities, movements or causes as a collective body, negates the use of an organizational name as a reference for anyone else. The organization was first begun as a network with a grant from the National Institute of Education. They could use it in whatever way they though best to focus attention on the educational issues they considered priorities or to provide a forum for a wide range of people to discuss educational problems of mutual interest.

Originally, the Grant Assistance Group grew out of the involvement of some of its present members in gathering information and data for the research report, Citizen Organizations: Citizen

Participation in Educational Decisionmaking, conducted by Dr. Marilyn Gittell under the auspices of the Institute for Responsive Education. During the course of the research for this report, discussion among various individuals led to their discovery of common concerns and interests regarding the Los Angeles school system, its problems, policies and administration. It was also felt that individuals who were involved with addressing educationally related topics could be more effective and successful if they were able to draw on a wider variety of resources and information as supplements to their own organizational activities and strategies.

The Grant Assistant Group was not initiated as either an advocacy/activist group or a resource/information center. It was set up to function as an informal network of people who could provide and share support, information and contacts on a wide range of topics and special interests. For example, members who have contacts or friendships in various social service, educational or government offices could either intervene for a network member seeking the help these offices could give or by merely passing on the name of the official best able to answer their questions or facilitate the resolution of a problem.

If one were to say that there is a central goal or purpose of the Grant Assistance Group, it would be facilitating and advocating increased citizen and parental participation and involvement in the operation of individual schools. Through this it fosters additional interest in the issues and problems that face the educational system as a whole. However, this is done completely on an individual basis. There is no active solicitation of outside targets to address or organizations to include. Members attempt to support each other in their efforts to become involved and exert more influence on the schools and the policies that affect their children.

The informal nature of the network obviates any need, or attempt, to establish a hierarchical leadership structure. There is no elected or unofficial leader of the group and no officers or Board of Directors exists. They do not collect dues, distribute materials, hold regular meetings, solicit media attention or carry out any of the normal mechanics of organizational maintenance. Meetings are more likely to involve a small number of individuals when they do occur, rather than the group as a whole. Most of the members have gotten to know each other from work on issues in other organizations to which they belong and, as a result, many of their network meetings are

more like social occasions.

The membership of this particular network is comprised of individuals from various socio-economic and ethnic groups. They are all active in their neighborhood schools as well as with a myriad of other education oriented groups in the Los Angeles schools. It is this kind of involvement that enables the members to exchange valuable and effective information and to offer each other numerous resources.

Although the members of this network do represent different backgrounds, the loose structure and lack of collective activity eliminates the problems that heterogeneous networks such as Apple Corps have experienced because the concerns and interests of its members are so often opposed. Although the different socio-economic backgrounds of the members of the Grant Assistance Group doesn't cause dissension, the difference in the priorities and concerns of the individuals are evident in the way members operate and the organizations they are active in. The upper class white women who participate in the group are primarily active in various dues organizations, fund-raising activities, political campaigns and ballot issues, while minority members are more involved with social service and community groups. As a result, network members often get the benefits

of wide ranging knowledge that helps to resolve inter-group conflicts and disagreements.

SELECTION OF ISSUES

As a network organization, the Grant Assistance Group does not select specific issues to confront. As an organization, members share concerns in certain areas; their discussions may lead to a heightened awareness about problems that exist and members may solicit the alliance of some of the other individuals or organizations represented within the network to work on various projects.

There are certain situations in the schools that many of the network members would like to see addressed and are doing so within the framework of other organizations that they belong to. Most of them talk about the need for parent in-service representation. Although there are mandated advisory councils and ethnic commissions in all schools, it is felt that these groups are too often mere extensions of the philosophies of the school principals and other administrators rather than a platform for any real parental input. One individual summed up his feelings

about the strength and effectivness of these advisory boards by saying,

> "Too often the members of these advisory boards serve as a kind of collective xerox machine to any programs the administration wants. In return they get sent to "education" conferences where they learn almost nothing of value."

Most of the parents who are attempting to get more people active in the schools feel that the absence of influential parent involvement is caused by the school system. Although parents and other community groups are encouraged to submit their ideas and concerns regarding school policies and principles, they are usually not taken into consideration when the decisions are made.

In the report, Citizen Organizations: Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking, it is noted that within the Los Angeles Unified School District there,

> "Seems to be an unwritten policy to stand firm and not bend to parent groups that demonstrate or cause disruption by making their demands known."

Although Los Angeles has a larger number of mandated advisory groups, commissions and other education oriented organizations than most other American cities, the existance of these groups did not produce a climate conducive to citizen participation.

One member of the Grant Assistance Group said,

> "On paper Los Angeles looks like it has great community participation but in reality, little really exists."

The kind of parent representation they would like to see in the schools would allow for an uncensored, unsupervised, non-political involvement. As it stands now, many feel that the power and clout of the members of the school advisory groups and ethnic commissions ultimately rests with the principals and other school officials. The input of these groups may be solicited but any attempts at implementation are usually submerged unless the end results are in-line with desired school policy.

Although California has one of the strongest and most active state education departments and state legislatures, too many of the parents who are involved in the schools feel that this makes little difference in the receptivness of these agencies to their concerns.

This is the kind of broad based issue that the Grant Assistance Group does not address as a whole. Some of its members may be involved in school issues and are themselves working to be allowed more input in the school system, but it is an individual

crusade, not a group project. For example, an issue that the network might have addressed as a group is the current controversial school desegregation case now before the courts. At present, it is an emotional and explosive issue for parents, school officials and students but the group has not, and does not plan to, address this issue at all.

One issue that does concern many of the members is the increasing violence in the schools and the attempts at curbing this problem utilized by school administrators. Security precautions have been instituted as deterrants to crime and violence at many of the Los Angeles schools. These include, in many areas, increased physical security in the schools during the day as well as the installation of personnel to check the identification of students and others entering the buildings. Because of conditions, parents are beginning to compare schools to prisons and they want to see some other measures put into effect that would deal with the violence without making the students feel like criminals. Some black parents are also disturbed by what they see as the extreme measures being taken at predominantly black schools but not at white schools where the problem also exists and has reached comparable levels. Two of the network black parents have been working on a report on school violence which will attempt to define and identify the causes as well as offer

what they see as viable solutions to the problem.

One of the needs that members would like to see filled is the establishment of some kind of organization specifically geared to gathering information and data which would be made available to community groups and others for research purposes. The network itself has access to information that, for the most part, is supplied by the members. Although this covers a wide range of topics, they believe the need exists for a more centralized and precise source. Currently they feel their access to administrative heads and other officials in the city is non-existant.

These issues, however, do not form the basis for any kind of collective program or strategy for this group. They are not concerned with attaining any kind of concrete power or broad-based community support as a linkage with other networks and organizations. As a group of active and involved citizens and parents, they are concerned about the quality of education children in Los Angeles schools are receiving and are working to change and improve the system. They see the network, as it exists now, as a vehicle to share information, discuss problems, gain support and compare strategies and tactics rather than as an activist organization.

Given the areas of interest and the activism of its members, an informal, non-structured group works best for these parents. They think of its success only in terms of what they have each been able to extract of value from the group. At this time, the members are not sure how much longer the group will last and this in itself is not extremely important to them. Most no longer view the network as a formal organization but feel it has become a valuable group of resource people who call each other on the phone, see each other at meetings, exchange information when needed, and generally stay involved in their own areas of interest.

The reason the group did not become incorporated is reflected in the way it operates. Members did not want any organized, structured group that would take time away from the other things they were involved in and could see no purpose or reason to establish the organization on that basis.

IV. SUMMARY

The failure of the public schools to deliver an adequate education has become the most effective catalyst for parent and citizen involvement that exists today. The continuing inability of the schools to provide the skills and knowledge students need to compete has prodded parents and community members to join together to try and change the system. As a concerned parent in Los Angeles said,

> "We must take a serious look at the quality of education in the schools. They seem to be programmed for failure at this point; too few kids from low-income families are making it today and we have to find out why."

The growth of citizen networks in education has helped to strengthen those that have been concerned about the schools and have tried to translate that concern into action that would be listened to and heeded by school officials. When it became obvious to most parents that they didn't have the power, influence or clout to make any difference in school policy by themselves, the benefits of alliances with others involved in fighting for the same changes became apparent.

The impact of citizen networks on the whole cannot really be measured this early in their history. It would seem that with organization, effective leadership and active memberships these networks

can be an important force in the educational system.

They can become an effective lobbying group for policy and educational changes within the system that may, in a few years time, help to turn around the present course of the public schools.

The two networks profiled in this report use very different strategies and have very different goals. Apple Corps is attempting to reach out to all the existing community organizations that are concerned with education, join them with parents and establish a powerful, broad based coalition. An important part of their program is the education of parents on the very basics of activist involvement in education. This ranges from attending parent-teacher conferences and being able to ask the right questions about their children's performance in school to becoming familiar with school board policy and decisionmaking procedures. Apple Corps has the potential for a great deal of success and effectivness. Its director is able to identify the wider issues that need to be addressed by the group and she is able to take advantage of opportunities for the goals of the group to be explained and demonstrated to a wide range of people. Its membership, though relatively small at the moment, is active and committed to making it work. They have managed, in a relatively short amount of time,

to make contacts with school board administrators university personnel, members of the business community, civic groups and the media. As a result, Apple Corps has easy and constant access to various studies, reports and proposed policies that come out of various education oriented offices and foundations. In addition, they respond to any opportunity offered to make suggestions and provide input regarding new programs and policy being considered for implementation in the Atlanta schools.

The problems that Apple Corps still must overcome are not small ones. It must be able to gain the credibility and trust of the black and low income communities and "rise above" its Junior League beginnings. The group must also find ways to bring together the concerns and priorities of the members of a diverse group in order to unite behind certain issues. Hopefully, they will also make a successful attempt to recruit more low income members and counter the minority expectations that Apple Corps will end up singing only the praises of the public school system without any true criticism of the negative aspects. Another important factor in the future success of Apple Corps is the freedom that the officers of the Board of Directors will allow the director have in choosing and implementing policies she feels the organ-

ization should address. This is especially relevant since the activities and programs of Apple Corps have already been retarded considerably due to the resignation of the organization's first director, who left because of restrictions placed on her by the Board of Directors.

In direct oppostion to the strategies of Apple Corps are those of the Grant Assistance Group of Los Angeles whose organizational structure is totally informal and undefined. This group exists only as a vehicle for information and resource exchanges and to provide its members with support and contacts in organizations they belong to.

There is no impact on the educational system, no linkage with politicians, school administrators, universities or other agencies that can provide additional resources. Thus, their success cannot be measured on the same scale as that of Apple Corps. If the effectivness of the Grant Assistance Group can be gauged by how fully the group fulfills the needs of its members, who are all extremely active in other areas of educational concerns, then it has succeeded in meeting its goals. At this time, the group is, for all intents and purposes, defunct. Unless some major issue of importance comes along which all members feel can best be handled as a network group, the activity of the organization will remain non-existant. However, the network has succeeded in putting people

with different interests and from various social and economic groups in touch with each other. It has enabled them, in certain instances, to extract information and assistance from sources they have had no previous contact with. In essence, the members are drawing what they need from the network and then returning to the organizations they are affiliated with to work on the matters that are relevant to them and reflect their interests and concerns.

Networking, joined with increased parent participation, can provide the support and voice needed to affect the educational institutions in this country. Many school administrators are still convinced that parents and community members have no place in the decisionmaking process of the schools and the question of whether this involvement is an ultimately beneficial one, still remains uncertain. However, it is important that avenues of exploration are opened to all parties and that attempts at communication are made before parental and citizen input can be discounted as divisive or useless. In order for this to happen, the pressure has to come from the parents to initiate some kind of mutual cooperation between the educators and themselves. Citizen networks can help provide that pressure through the use of its members, resources and strengths.